REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

This is a reply to the Office Action dated December 29, 2006.

Status of Claims

Claims 5-15 are pending in this application. Claims 1-4 have been canceled. New Claims 11-15 have been added.

Amendments Discussion

Editorial amendments have been made to Claims 5 and 8 to correct the alphabetic ordering of the recited steps. The amendments made to Claim 7, step c. and Claim 8, step f., and the new Claims 12-14, are supported, for example, at page 4, lines 26-29 and page 10, lines 9-15, of the present specification. New Claims 11 and 15 are supported, for example, at page 7, lines 23-35 and page 10, lines 16-18. No new matter has been introduced.

Anticipation Rejections

Claims 1-4 and 7 have been rejected under U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by Mullane (U.S. Pat. No. 4,878,825).

The Office Action urges that Mullane discloses a method of debossing a plastic web reading on independent Claims 1, 3, and 7 as filed (referencing col. 18, lines 53-68 and Fig. 15).

Applicants point out that Claims 1-4 have been canceled, rendering that portion of this rejection moot.

Regarding Claim 7, this claim has been presently amended to clarify that the polymer material is extruded as filamentary material.

As apparently appreciated in the Office Action, Mullane only discloses extrusion of a web in the form of a substantially planar plastic film onto a foraminous forming member (e.g., col. 18, line 53 to col. 19, line 5, col. 19, lines 44-45), and not filamentary material. Therefore, Mullane does not anticipate Claim 7 as amended.

In view of at least the above, reconsideration and withdrawal of this rejection is requested.

Claims 1-2 and 7 have been rejected under U.S.C. §102(e) as being anticipated by Faulkner et al. (U.S. Pat. No. 6,942,711).

The Office Action asserts that Faulkner et al. teaches a spunbond process of supplying a molten polymer (nonwoven film) which is extruded onto a foraminous surface (referencing col. 6, lines 40-50), and that the foraminous surface is a three-dimensional image transfer device (referencing col. 4, lines 55-62 and col. 6, lines 66-67).

Applicants point out that Claims 1-2 have been canceled, rendering that portion of this rejection moot.

Regarding Claim 7, Applicants point out that amended Claim 7 specifies, among other things: "c. extruding said molten polymer as filamentary material directly onto said three-dimensional transfer device forming an imaged fabric." The reference in the Office Action to col. 6, lines 40-50 and col. 4, lines 55-62 of Faulkner et al. describes a spunbond process comprising melt-spinning continuous filaments that are collected on a surface such as a wire mesh conveyor for hydroentanglement. There is no mention in this section of Faulkner cited by the Examiner of extrusion of the filamentary material directly onto a three-dimensional transfer device to form an imaged fabric.

Therefore, the hydroentanglement processing as described by Faulkner et al. does not appear to be related to amended Claim 7 and clearly does not anticipate it.

In view of at least the above, reconsideration and withdrawal of this rejection is requested.

Obviousness Rejection

Claims 3-6 and 8-10 have been rejected under U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Faulkner et al. as applied to Claims 1-2 and 7, and further in view of Putnam et al. (U.S. Pat. No. 6,903,034).

Applicants point out that the assignment records of the US PTO show and confirm that the present application and Faulkner et al. are commonly assigned to the same entity: Polymer Group, Inc. The subject matter of Faulkner et al. and the presently claimed invention were commonly owned or subject to an obligation of assignment to the same entity at the time the present claimed invention was made.

Therefore, the Faulkner et al. patent is disqualified as prior art under §103 against the present claims pursuant to the provisions of 35 U.S.C. §103(c). For at least this reason, this obviousness rejection based in part on Faulkner et al. must be withdrawn.

Applicants also note that Putnam et al., like Faulkner et al, discloses hydroentanglement of webs comprising preformed and prequenched polymer filaments.

In embodiments of the present invention, methods are provided for making an imaged fabric by directly extruding filamentary polymeric melt onto a three-dimensional surface or support substrate positioned thereof, or an imaged film by extruding polymeric melt onto a support layer positioned on a three-dimensional surface.

The present independent Claims 7 and 8 recite, among other things, extruding the molten polymer onto the support layer positioned on the foraminous surface or directly onto the three-dimensional transfer device. Putnam et al. does not teach or suggest this feature of the present invention.

In view of at least the above, reconsideration and withdrawal of the obviousness rejection is respectfully requested.

It is believed that this application is in condition for allowance, and notice of such is respectfully requested.

If the Examiner believes that a teleconference would be useful in expediting the prosecution of this application, the official is kindly invited to contact Applicant's representative of record indicated below.

Respectfully submitted,

/Ramon R. Hoch/
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